

**Speech by Ms Maria Larsson at the Fourth World Forum  
Against Drugs at Munchenbryggeriet in Stockholm, 19 May  
2014.**

Your Majesty, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I take part in the Fourth World Forum Against Drugs here in Stockholm. I appreciate this forum and I have personally attended since its start. I want to thank the organizers for their tireless work to keep these important issues in the spotlight. Today I am more convinced than ever that we need to be persistent in our efforts to enable a drug free society.

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For some time now we have seen an increased support for decriminalisation and even legalization of drugs. NGOs, think tanks, journalists and recently even governments, argue that a more liberal policy is the way ahead and thereby they also question the internationally agreed Conventions on Narcotic Drugs.

In Sweden there is strong support for the Conventions on Narcotic Drugs and for a restrictive but also balanced drug policy. I feel as a minister with responsibility for these issues, that I have a very clear mandate to work against this trend in my country and that I have an obligation to cooperate with others at a global level.

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I believe that we must work bottom-up and top-down at the same time. Let me explain how. Governments must show political leadership because it is our job to decide about measures of universal prevention, early intervention and treatment as well as supply reduction. We must decide about strategies which include all these aspects. So there is definitely a top-down approach to this issue.

But governments alone cannot do the job. We are not the ones who work in schools, in sports clubs, within social services or voluntary work. A large share has to be done by NGOs and at the local level as it is often the civil society that maintains and strengthens the values in a society. So the bottom-up approach is

equally important and essential to create and maintain this strong anti-narcotic culture.

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In the upcoming days this conference will deal with various aspects of illegal drugs, for example Cannabis. Cannabis has been at the centre of the debate and therefore I wanted to stimulate research and findings about the health risks related to this drug. Also in Sweden a share of young people think that Cannabis is not unhealthy.

So, in November last year my Government organised an international conference in Stockholm with some of the most experienced researchers in this field.

The main conclusions from that conference were that the effects on brain and body make the drug dangerous in itself and that Cannabis serves as a gateway to other drugs. I very much hope this forum will build on and gather even more knowledge about the effects of the use of Cannabis and also provide us with strong arguments against Cannabis-use and against liberalisation of drug policy.

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Another area I want to mention is how drug treatment and law enforcement can cooperate. I am very impressed with the work undertaken by the Stockholm Municipality and the County Council to renew and develop its methods. And one example is a project with the attempt to integrate the judicial work with treatment measures.

The Stockholm County Police collaborates with the city's Social Services and Health Care. When a young person is caught by the police and suspected for drug related crimes. He or she is questioned and tested at a special centre. Not at the police station.

The youngster is also immediately introduced to staff from the Social Services and Health Care. And offered access to treatment. I believe this is an example of innovative methods at a

local level but also an example of cooperation between law enforcement and treatment.

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This year marks the 25 year anniversary of the Convention on the rights of the child. This Convention is the most ratified Human Rights Treaty and it is also the only human rights convention where protection from narcotic drugs is particularly mentioned. I want to thank you, Your Majesty, for bringing this issue up and for participating also in the framework of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which we both attended in Vienna recently.

I believe we must all join forces from today and towards 2016. In two years the UN General Assembly will hold a Special Session on Narcotic Drugs in New York. The support for the Narcotic Conventions can never be taken for granted. The work to maintain support for them is a joint responsibility.

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To conclude, let me remind us that you or I do not work alone. This event shows that we can join forces to work bottom-up and top-down as well in Sweden as when we create alliances across borders.

Thank you.